CSU *QuestionPoint* Services: A 2017 Update

By Johanna Alexander, CSU Virtual Reference/QuestionPoint Coordinator, Submitted Sept. 29, 2017

This report provides an overview and comparison of CSU library participation in the *QuestionPoint* (QP) cooperative reference service for calendar years 2015 and 2016 with some comparisons to earlier years.

The *QuestionPoint* Service

In addition to the current sixteen CSUs, the UCs, and California Community Colleges participating in the QP Cooperative, academic library networks in Washington, Oregon, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Boston, the U.K. and Ireland are also members of this service. These are just some of the academic systems in the QuestionPoint cooperative. In total, there are over 400 individual academic libraries participating in the QP cooperative covering six time zones. This, along with QP's after-hours staffing, provides 24/7 reference service for all students and faculty from participating institutions including the CSUs.

Participation

Often designated as the "Ask a Librarian" service, eighteen CSU libraries were part of the cooperative in 2015. In 2016 and currently, sixteen CSUs participate and include the following campuses.

Bakersfield	Humboldt	San Bernardino
Cal Poly SLO	Long Beach	Stanislaus
Chico	Los Angeles	Pomona
East Bay	Northridge	San Diego
Fresno	Sacramento	Sonoma
Fullerton		

CSU QP libraries monitor all QP academic queues (including CSUs) at least four hours per week, answer their own user's QP email requests, provide follow-up of forwarded chat sessions, and may monitor additional hours of their own library's queue.

CSU QP User Survey Data

The majority of CSU users report a positive experience in using the QP/Ask a Librarian Service. Collected user survey data was analyzed from 1,276 surveys. This survey data was aggregated from eleven of the participating campuses who were able to provide survey reports by the requested deadline. Data from common questions asked by CSU QP Libraries from July 1, 2015 through July 1, 2017 resulted in these averages and highlights.

- ❖ 71% of respondents were first time users of the QP service.
- ❖ 26% of respondents had used the service before.
- ❖ 87% of respondents said the librarian was helpful.
- ❖ 83% of respondents were satisfied with the answer to their question (or . . . they received sufficient information in response to their question). In a slightly different version of the question, "Were you satisfied with the answer you received to your reference question," 73% were satisfied and 11% were somewhat satisfied.
- ❖ 93% of respondents answered favorably regarding the ease of using the service with 71% respondents saying it was *very easy* using this service and 22% saying it was *easy* to use this service.
- ❖ 88% would use the service again. Another question asked the degree to which the user would likely use the service again. Respondents to this question answered with 73% very likely and 19% maybe.

CSU QP Usage

CSU QP usage increased in 2015 as compared to 2014 by 897 requests. From 2015 to 2016, due to two fewer campuses participating, the number of requests dropped by 1,171. While the actual number of requests declined from 2015 to 2016, the ratio of total questions to the number of campuses participating increased. In real numbers then, more requests were made per campus in 2016 than in any of the previous three years. Among CSU users, QP chat continues to be the most used service as compared to QP email. The following summary and Chart 1 show data from 2013 through 2016.

2013 Data

- ❖ 10,881 QP requests were made by CSU users in 2013.
- ❖ 92% (9,975) of the requests were chat requests.
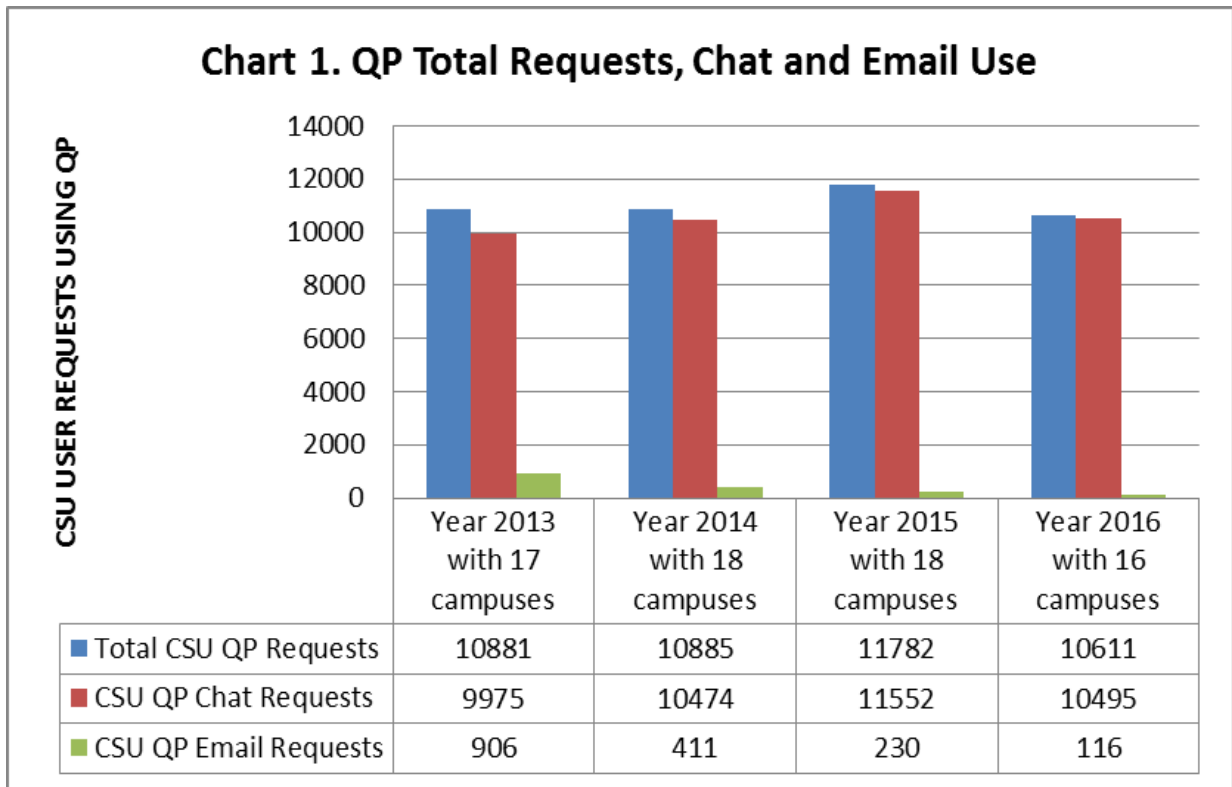- ❖ 8% (906) of the requests were email requests.

2014 Data

- ❖ 10,885 QP requests were made by CSU users in 2014.
- ❖ 96% (10,474) of the requests were chat requests
- ❖ 4% (411) of the requests were email requests.

2015 Data
- ❖ 11,782 QP requests were made by CSU users in 2015.
- ❖ 98% (11,552) of the requests were chat requests
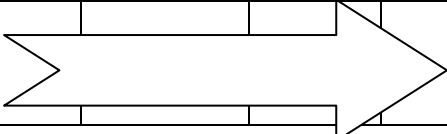- ❖ 2% (230) of the requests were email requests.

2016 Data
- ❖ 10, 611 QP requests were made by CSU users in 2016.
- ❖ 99% (10495) of the requests were chat requests
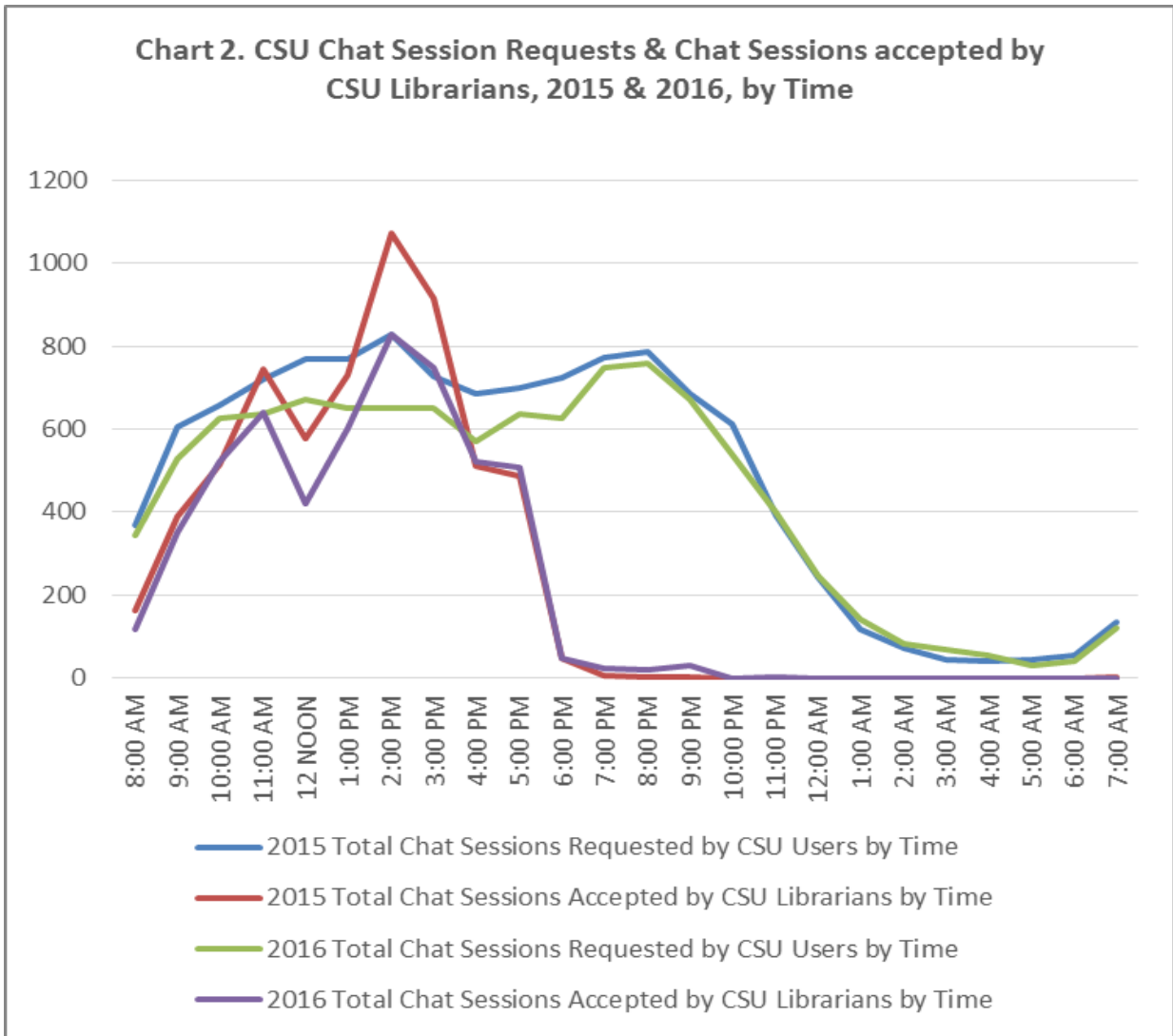- ❖ 1% (116) of the requests were email requests.

Chart 1. QP Total Requests, Chat and Email Use

	Year 2013 with 17 campuses	Year 2014 with 18 campuses	Year 2015 with 18 campuses	Year 2016 with 16 campuses
Total CSU QP Requests	10881	10885	11782	10611
CSU QP Chat Requests	9975	10474	11552	10495
CSU QP Email Requests	906	411	230	116

CSU Contribution Percentages

According to QP consortia guidelines, library groups such as the CSU should aim for a *contribution percentage* of about 75%. This measure is based on the ratio of total chat sessions accepted by the library group to the total number of chat requests generated from their users. One of the goals in 2015 was to increase the CSU contribution percentage to 60%. That goal has not yet been met, but from January through August of 2017, the contribution percentage for the CSU increased to 56%, in large part to several campuses increasing their individual campus contribution percentages. Increasing the CSU contribution percentage across all CSU participant libraries continues to be an important goal. CSU contribution data is shown in Table 1.

Pacific Time	CSU Chat Requests in 2013 by Time Period	CSU Chat Requests in 2014 by Time Period	CSU Chat Requests in 2015 by Time Period	CSU Chat Requests in 2016 by Time Period	Chat Sessions Accepted by CSU Librarians in 2013 by Time Period	Chat Sessions Accepted by CSU Librarians in 2014 by Time Period	Chat Sessions Accepted by CSU Librarians in 2015 by Time Period	Chat Sessions Accepted by CSU Librarians in 2016 by Time Period
Table 1. CSU QP Chat Usage and CSU Librarian Coverage by Time								
8:00 AM - 6:00 PM	5870 (59% of total)	6280 (60% of total)	6830 (59% of total)	5967 (57% of total)	5745 (99% of total)	5584 (99% of total)	6101 (99% of total)	5259 (98% of total)
6:00 PM - 8:00 AM	4105 (41% of total)	4194 (40% of total)	4722 (41% of total)	4528 (43% of total)	62 (1% of total)	61 (1% of total)	56 (1 %)	126 (2% of total)
Totals	9975	10474	11552	10495	5807	5645	6157	5385
CSU Contribution Percentages					5807/997= 58%	5645/1047= 54%	6157/11552= 53%	5385/10495= 51%

Comparison of CSU QP Usage and Staffing by Time

CSU QP usage by time shows similar patterns as in previous years. As shown in Table 1, in 2015, 59 percent, and in 2016, 57 percent of total CSU user chat requests were received between 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM. In 2015, 41 percent, and in 2016, 43 percent of CSU chat requests were received between 6:00 PM and 8:00 AM. Ninety-eight to ninety-nine percent of CSU librarian monitoring hours fall in the 8 AM to 6 PM time period. It is clear that the QP cooperative service provides valuable coverage for over 40% of CSU user questions posed in the evening and early morning hours. Additionally, these questions may be forwarded to the user's own campus for further follow-up assistance. Chart 2 compares the times CSU users are using the QP service and the times CSU librarians are monitoring the QP queue. Data for 2015 and 2016 reflect very similar patterns.

Chart 2. CSU Chat Session Requests & Chat Sessions accepted by CSU Librarians, 2015 & 2016, by Time

- 2015 Total Chat Sessions Requested by CSU Users by Time
- 2015 Total Chat Sessions Accepted by CSU Librarians by Time
- 2016 Total Chat Sessions Requested by CSU Users by Time
- 2016 Total Chat Sessions Accepted by CSU Librarians by Time

QuestionPoint Enhancements

Some of *QuestionPoint's* improvements and enhancements implemented in the last two years and future plans are summarized. This information was provided by Wren Spangler from OCLC/QP Services.

❖ *HTTPS links clickable in patron web form* - Users can now get to your recommended resources faster.

❖ *Enhanced accessibility to interface for visually impaired librarians and library users.*

- ❖ *Improved headlines and instructions on policy pages*
- ❖ *ShiftPlanning (now called Humanity)* has led to an increase in coverage and patron satisfaction.
- ❖ *Easier handling of e-mail non-delivery reports* - Outgoing QuestionPoint emails now include a Reply-To header set to a library's notification email address. This new feature improves identification of some bounced emails.
- ❖ *Patron Terms of Service Link* - A link to the Patron Terms of Service has been added to the footer of the transcript email.
- ❖ *Improved e-mail deliverability to reduce the number of QP messages marked as spam.*
- ❖ *Increased password protection for users.*
- ❖ Enhancements being explored for 2018 include: spell check, mobile compatibility for the administrative module and improvements to workflow features for increased productivity. In addition to interface modifications, QP plans to update the infrastructure that supports QuestionPoint by moving the service from Flash technology to HTML5.

Future Goals for CSU QP Services

The following are goals for the CSU QP service.

1. Continue to increase CSU usage of QP services by encouraging CSU libraries to add the *Ask a Librarian* link to other CSU campus systems such as Blackboard, the ULMS, and library social media sites.

2. Continue to increase CSU's QP contribution percentage to at least 60% by encouraging CSU librarians to accept, at a minimum, two sessions per monitoring hour whenever possible and monitor their local queue outside their global cooperative hours.

3. Confirm user surveys are implemented with select core common questions used for all CSU QP Libraries.

Some Comments from CSU QP Campus Coordinators

An informal straw poll was taken of CSU QP Campus Coordinators. This call for comments was sent out at a very busy time of the term and with a very short turnaround time so this limited the number of responses. The responses are listed in the order received.

For the life of me I cannot understand why any CSU campus would not choose to leverage QP for reference. We do local chat during "normal" hours via LibraryH3lp and cut over to QP when that is not on, and helped about 500+ patrons via each service last year. Hope this aggregate data helps demonstrate some value to the COLD group. (Let's pray they don't come up with an idea like, hey, let's create a CSU chat.)

1. *Yes. The QP Cooperative Service is useful to our students and faculty.*
2. *Yes, I'm in favor of keeping the QP service available to our users.*
3. *I don't think you could replicate or implement the scale and coverage provided by the QP Cooperative service. Our campus has been using it for many years and the response of user surveys has been very positive.*

I think our QP Cooperative service is very useful for our students. I do know that when I'm working I've assisted faculty from other CSUs, so I would say it is useful for them as well. I am completely in favor of keeping this service available. I think we need to continue to promote the service.

1. *Is the QP Cooperative Service useful to your students and faculty? (yes, no, other . . .) yes according to the comments we receive*
2. *Are you in favor of keeping this service available to your users? (yes, no, other ...) yes*
3. *Any other comments you have regarding the QP service at your library and campus. The availability of 24/7 service when we are unable to staff a reference desk is a very positive message regarding the library's commitment to providing services. It is a low cost option in comparison to extending reference desk service hours.*

Yes. I think that chat reference service (which currently comes to us in the form of QP) is useful for students, I think faculty tend to contact us directly.

2. Yes. I'm in favor of keeping some kind of chat reference available to our users.

3. I am unsure if QP is the best platform for this.

Pros:

- *24/7 coverage*
- *Consistent, reliable access to chat service.*
- *Shared coverage, reducing local staffing challenges.*

Cons:

- *I sense that users are sometimes/often? frustrated when they realize that they have not been connected with a local librarian. I see this both in our own students and when I am answering questions for students from other institutions..*
- *Because it is not local it can add a layer of complexity or barrier for students/users, in that they often ask a question and then have their question referred (rightly so) and then have to wait for a reply.*
- *Users don't discriminate between questions appropriate for QP & those that need to be directed to their institution. (And why should we expect them to?)*
- *The interface itself is not user friendly (for the librarian).*

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1) YES.

2) YES. ABSOLUTELY!

3) QP fills a significant niche in our total reference ecosystem. Since we are not available at all hours, it meets the students at the point and TIME of need. Our QP surveys are nearly all favorable, and even when QP answers sometimes fall short of what we might provide ourselves with our local knowledge, their conscientiousness in passing questions on to us provides us a chance to nuance answers.

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1. Is the QP Cooperative Service useful to your students and faculty? *Yes*
2. Are you in favor of keeping this service available to your users? *Yes*
3. Any other comments you have regarding the QP service at your library and campus.
Comments: The service is most useful when we have time to follow up with questions

the same day they are referred to our campus for support. The users expect chat to be immediate and we are trying to figure out how we can balance their need for immediate assistance with our workloads. For example, immediate responses can be difficult if librarians are teaching and/or taking on new responsibilities (ULMS, Affordable Learning Solutions, campus committees, grants, and other special projects).

1. **Is the QP Cooperative Service useful to your students and faculty?**
   Yes
2. **Are you in favor of keeping this service available to your users? (yes, no, other ...)**
   Yes

3. **Any other comments you have regarding the QP service at your library and campus.**
   After-hours service is expected and essential for our library. The latest stats show that in the last 90 days we are the busiest QP campus, in terms of the number of questions our users are asking and the number of questions our librarians are answering. I'm sure we'd be willing to consider using a different service if one were available (I remember hearing talk about a CSU-only service a while back), but we definitely have to have something.